

MOMNIPOTENT

FINDING PEACE, BALANCE, & JOY
IN YOUR VOCATION AS A MOTHER

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Dear Moms,

Do you know how amazing you are? Do you know how beautiful you are? Do you know how strong, talented, generous, and loving you are?

If you are like most women, you don't. It is time you found out.

Thank you for being a part of the *Momnipotent* study. Whatever your reason for being here, I am grateful for your presence. I know God has special plans for you, and it is my prayer that this study will bless your life in exactly the way you need right now. I already know that the gift of your participation is going to bless others.

Your presence is a gift because we women need each other. We need encouragement and support from other women because only other women can truly understand the ways in which our vocations as mothers are uniquely depleting.

We might know in our hearts that the seemingly tiny, thankless tasks we do every day are truly important, but it's hard to keep that truth in the forefront of our minds. We might know we are called to be a special gift to those we love, but sometimes we just get tired.

Are you tired? Are you struggling? Do you have some good days, but some pretty awful ones, too? Do you ever wonder why God would choose you, with all your weaknesses and shortcomings, for the daunting vocation of Catholic motherhood that you are living out?

Moms who struggle have a special place in my heart because I have been there myself, more times than I care to admit. I have been the disillusioned mom who knows she will lose it if she witnesses another potty accident, encounters another sulky teenager, or finds another sink full of dirty dishes. I have been the exhausted mom who snaps at the sound of breaking glass because it is *just too much already*. I have been the resentful mom who tires of always being the only one who thinks to replace a roll of toilet paper, wipe a sticky countertop, or change a stinky baby.



You might have heard some “churchy” talk in the past about how Catholic womanhood is a special and privileged calling. You might have heard the attractive message that your femininity, whether you realize it or not, is an irreplaceable gift from God to the world. You might “know” that you have uniquely feminine strengths with which you are called to bless your family, your community, your Church, and the whole world.

These are true and brilliantly empowering and liberating ideas, but it is time to connect these lofty ideas to the real world—you know, the one where the call to self-giving love comes daily and in the earthiest of ways: mouths to feed, bottoms to wipe, spills to clean, and laundry to fold.

And this is where *Momnipotent* comes in.

Momnipotence is a special charism that all moms have. Momnipotence is the special array of gifts given by God—lived out in particular through the vocation of motherhood—that blesses our families and the world. Gifts of love, gentleness, insight, compassion, and more enable us to live out our roles as spouse and mother to the fullest. These gifts are both our call to greatness and the means by which we can help others, specifically our children, find their call to greatness.



Unlike the only Being who is truly omnipotent—God—we moms certainly are not all-powerful. The proof of this is that we still overcook every fourth meal or bark at our kids at the end of a particularly tiring day. But, in the wisdom of that same God, we do possess a power that is unparalleled in society and, in particular, in our families—the ability to love in unique and necessary ways. Every woman is “momnipotent,” whether she knows it or not.

Welcome to the *Momnipotent* study. I am so glad you are here. I can’t wait to get started.

Danielle Bean

Session One

Why You Are Momnipotent

The feminine strength of “momnipotence”

*An introduction to the dignity and respect we
owe to the vocation of motherhood*



All women are “momnipotent” whether they know it or not. By “momnipotent” we refer to the strength that women find in using their uniquely feminine strengths to love and serve others—especially their families—in unique and necessary ways. The work of motherhood is not only life-changing, world-changing stuff, it is life-changing, world-changing stuff only we can do.

Opening Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of being here today with other women like me, women who sometimes struggle like I do and who share many of my own goals and longings. Bless our efforts as we encourage and support one another in learning more about our motherhood and the important role we women play in our homes, in our families, and in our Church. Open our hearts and make us receptive to what you want us to learn about ourselves and our role in the world as we grow ever closer to you. Amen.



Quiz (T/F)

- _____ 1. Every woman is called to be a mother.
- _____ 2. The ways in which women differ from men can be a source of feminine strength.
- _____ 3. The term “feminine strength” is an oxymoron.
- _____ 4. There are ways in which women are stronger than men.
- _____ 5. Sometimes, women need to be a bit more “masculine” in order to find success and happiness in this world.

Video

In this session, Kate Wicker joins us as we discuss the dignity and worth of the motherly vocation and our culture’s reluctance to recognize it.

Journaling and Personal Reflection

1. In what ways are the terms “woman” and “mother” synonymous? Did you ever think of yourself as a “mother” before you actually became one?
2. What kinds of things can “only a mother” do? Are these skills a source of strength or weakness for women?
3. Have you ever referred to yourself as “just a mom”? What was the sentiment behind that phrase, and why did you use it? Do you ever feel pressured to downplay your work as a mother? If so, describe how.

4. What are some worldly definitions of fulfillment and happiness? In what ways does embracing motherhood get in the way of these?

5. List five feminine strengths you have or that you have noticed in other women. Are any of these part of the definition of “momnipotent” found in the Introduction of *Momnipotent* (page 5)? Are any of these associated with success in your mind? If so, in what ways?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6. If you have ever been pregnant, what were some of the natural and instinctual ways your body prompted you toward nurturing your child before he/she was even born?

7. Do you sometimes feel devalued by the “hidden” role of mother? What are some ways that Mary models strength through hiddenness?

Small-Group Discussion

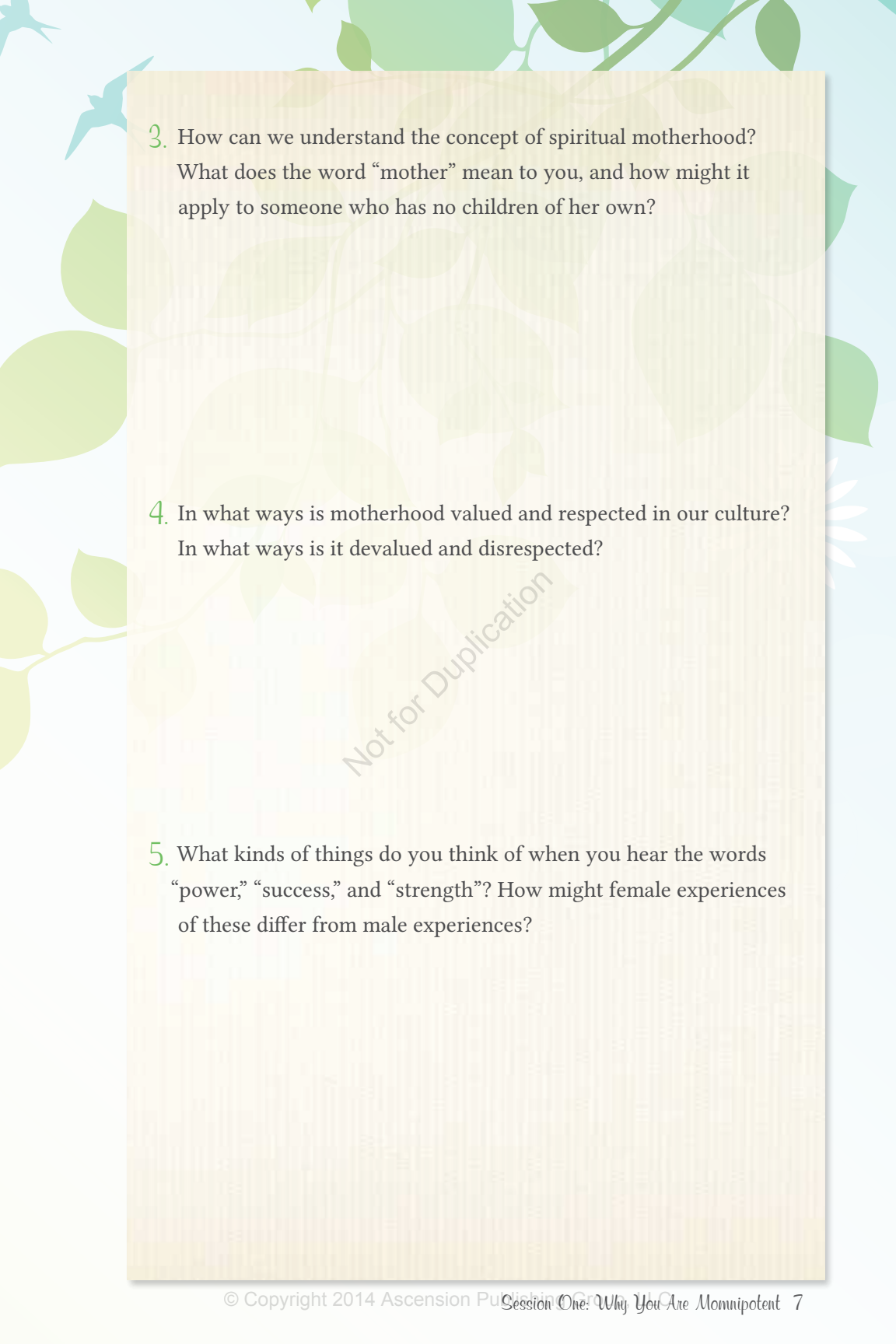
1. As St. John Paul II has said:

Motherhood is woman's vocation. It is an eternal vocation. ... '[A] mother who understands everything and embraces each of us with her heart. ...' Today the world is particularly 'hungry and thirsty' for that motherhood, which is woman's vocation 'physically' and 'spiritually,' as it is Mary's.¹

What does this passage say to you? Does any part of it make you uncomfortable? If so, why?

2. Can you think of any modern-day writers or thinkers who, like Mary Elizabeth Williams (see *Momnipotent*, page 14), might object to the above statement? What do you think their objection might be?

¹ John Paul II, General Audience, 10 January 1979.

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3. How can we understand the concept of spiritual motherhood? What does the word “mother” mean to you, and how might it apply to someone who has no children of her own?
4. In what ways is motherhood valued and respected in our culture? In what ways is it devalued and disrespected?
5. What kinds of things do you think of when you hear the words “power,” “success,” and “strength”? How might female experiences of these differ from male experiences?
- Not for Duplication

For Reflection

After my son Stephen's recent birthday party, my mother sent me some pictures of the day, and I noticed one in particular. Not because it was unusual, but because it was so typical. It was a smiling birthday kid with his birthday cake ... presented to him by an unidentified pair of hands. I have dozens of photos like this. And the hands are always mine. I specialize in off-camera, behind-the-scenes moments like this.

I used to wonder at the way some mothers seemed content to give themselves completely over to the lifelong service of others—my own mother especially. When I was young and inexperienced, the seemingly endless supply of maternal generosity astonished me, and I didn't think I could ever forget my selfish self long enough to accomplish such a thing.

But then God made me a mother.

While I have certainly not become perfectly selfless, the preciousness of my own children in my own eyes has made me realize that it is not half so bad to play a supporting role. To be the giver. The organizer. The behind-the-scenes, unseen, unrecognized doer and supporter.

I am still not naturally selfless. I am still not as generous as I ought to be, but I do relish a quiet role these days. I am often content to do nothing more than watch the people—the real, autonomous, and fascinating *people*—my children are becoming. I don't expect everyone to understand it, but I think most mothers can. I am happy to be the unnamed source of the full bellies and clean laundry that support my loved ones along their way. I am pleased to be the hands that support them, on their birthdays and every day.



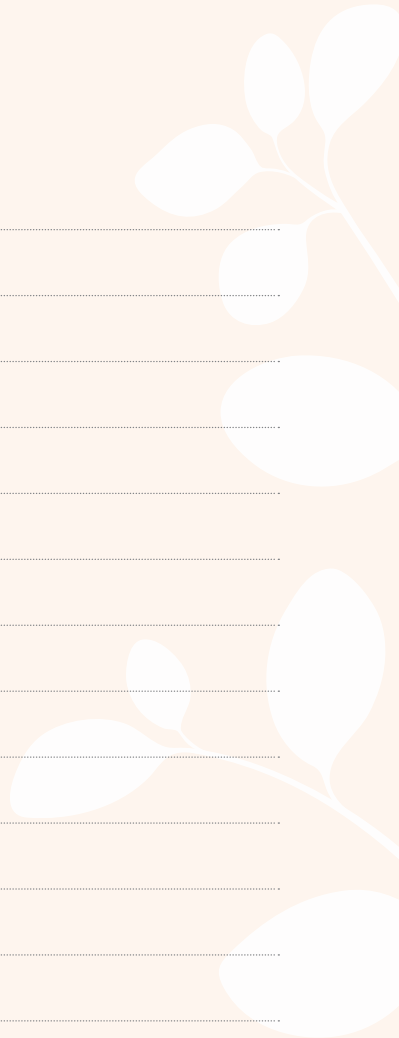
Large-Group Discussion

1. How does the idea of being a “hidden servant” strike you? Are there parts of you that reject such a role? Why or why not?
2. “Behind every great man is a great woman.” Discuss what this statement means. Is it an “old fashioned” notion, or are there ways it still applies today?
3. Share some passages where women, especially Mary, are mentioned in the Bible. How has the world changed for women since then, and in what ways is it the same?

Notes

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

Not for Duplication



At Home

Read the introduction in *Momnipotent* (pages 1-5). Think about ways in which your daily life reflects the experiences of a “joyful” mom and a “disillusioned” mom. Are both real for you?



Read Mary’s “Magnificat” (Luke 1:46-55) and spend a few moments in prayer asking God to help you see your strengths as a mother.



Pay attention to the signs of respect (and disrespect) shown to women and mothers in popular culture. Be prepared to share some of these observations with the group next time.



As you go about your work this week, take note of some of the ways your role as “mother” is supportive and unseen. Practice gratitude for the unique perspective you have from your privileged place “behind the scenes” in your home and family.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, we are grateful for the time we have spent together and look forward to growing closer to you and sharing with one another in the sessions to come. As we go about the uniquely challenging work of motherhood, open our eyes to see the ways you are calling us to use our feminine gifts in service to you through others. We are grateful for those you have entrusted to our care. Make us worthy of the role of “mother.” Amen.





Not for Duplication

